

Dear Representative Luxenberg, Senator Moore, and members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Alex Speiser. I am a homeowner and resident in New Haven. I am a public school teacher in Fairfield County, and my own children attend the New Haven Public Schools. I am a member of CT Tenants Union, and I have spoken to hundreds of renters around New Haven about their housing situations.

I am testifying in support of a rent cap and in support of SB 4, but this bill needs amendments so that it will be adequate to the scope of the problem CT residents are facing. Specifically, the bill needs a lower cap on rent increases. I suggest 3% which is low enough to protect tenants from the price gouging that is now going on in the rental market. The rent cap must also apply when tenants move in and out because otherwise landlords will have an incentive to evict tenants paying their rent every month just so that the landlord can jack up rents. And it should expand good cause eviction protections. Senior citizens already benefit from these protections, and they show the policy works. We need this policy to apply universally, and especially to families with children.

As a homeowner, I have the incredible benefit of housing security. That security has not only allowed me to put down roots in New Haven, but encouraged me to do so. My kids can feel confident that they will not be uprooted from their schools, but their friends who rent from the big corporate landlords in town live in fear of displacement. That lack of security impairs their learning in every way, from reading and math to the social and emotional. I teach in a wealthy district where almost everyone can take their housing for granted, and I see everyday how much it helps kids come to school ready to learn.

Everyone deserves the benefits of being a homeowner, and everyone benefits when all residents have housing security. Almost nothing is more beneficial to CT as a whole than stable communities where people feel safe, secure, and can plan for the future. A thriving Connecticut begins when its residents have an affordable place to call home.

I also want to tell you what I have seen knocking doors in New Haven. Over and over again, I have talked to tenants so desperate to maintain their housing that they fear reporting unhealthy living conditions to their landlords. They live with mold, pests, crumbling walls and ceilings and staircases, sinks that flood, and boarded up windows. They live with smoke detectors constantly beeping because the landlords are not bothering to do even the most basic maintenance required to be in compliance with local housing codes. Tenants tough it out when the heat is broken because at best landlords ignore maintenance requests and at worst the tenants fear retaliation. If the renters complain, they fear that the landlord will find someone even more desperate to take their place. It's a race to the bottom because the power balance is tilted so heavily towards the landlords. And these tenants report massive rent hikes while their buildings are falling apart. The rent revenue is not being reinvested into the properties or our communities. We want people spending their hard earned money at our local businesses, not watching it get extracted by some big corporate landlord.

Sincerely,
Alexander Speiser of New Haven